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ABSTRACT

The paper provides guidelines to help secondary school social studies classroom teachers develop and implement a unit on the Manding ethnic group in Africa. The objective is to illustrate how the cultural approach to Manding and to area studies in general can help students understand economic and social structures in other nations. Manding is the name given to approximately eight million West Africans who share a common culture, history, and related languages. Types of literature which are effective in introducing students to African culture include general background studies, novels, autobiographical accounts, and epic poems. Teachers are directed to focus on 12 topics when using a cultural approach to studying African ethnic groups: stereotyped images of the group; climate and ecology; families and social structure; religion; education; the arts; political systems; slavery and the slave trade; Africa and the European conquest; colonialism, the rise of nationalism, and independence; and economic development. For each of these topics, background information, resources, and examples are given which relate to the Manding. The paper concludes with the recommendation that teachers borrow additional teaching aids on the Manding from the African Studies Program at the University of Illinois. An address, ordering information, and description of materials is included. (DB)

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GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING AN INSTRUCTIONAL UNIT ON AFRICA: THE MANDING OF WEST AFRICA[1]

By Edna G. Bay

There are many ways that American social studies teachers can approach the study of Africa. They include, for example, overviews of geography or history, analyses of problems of economic development, studies of one or more African nations, or studies of one or more ethnic groups. This guide for developing a unit on Manding culture[2] is meant to illustrate the cultural approach through a single representative ethnic group, the people known collectively as the Manding. Although these suggestions will be most suitable for upper secondary teachers, the reading and supporting AV materials here recommended can be adapted for student levels as low as the sixth grade.

Manding is an umbrella term used to describe a number of West African peoples who share a common culture, history, and related languages. The Manding, who number more than eight million, include ethnic groups[3] called the Mandinka (also known as Mandingo or Malinke), the Bambara, and the Dyula, to name only the best known. They inhabit a vast area of West Africa that includes all or parts of the modern nations of Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea

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[1]An earlier draft of these guidelines was written by Richard A. Corby and me as part of a special project on African curriculum development for public schools carried out at the University of Illinois from 1977-1980. The core of the project, which was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, consisted of a series of four-week workshops held in three successive summers on the University of Illinois campus. Workshop participants, who were educators from Missouri, Arkansas, and Illinois, developed instructional units on Africa to incorporate into their classroom work.

[2]Readers of Social Education may recall "The Manding Name Game" (Nov.-Dec. 1979; Vol. 43, No. 7) a classroom exercise bsed on family names which introduces students to economic and social structures of Manding communities.

[3]The word "tribe" has a pejorative connotation and should be avoided in teaching about Africa. "Ethnic group" is a term familiar to American students which better expresses the realities of groupings of people in Africa.

Bissau, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Mali, Upper Volta, and Ghana.

The study of a single group such as the Manding, when that group is representative of a broad segment of African culture, allows students to identify with Africans on an individual or community level, at the same time that they learn themes and concepts common to the experience of a wide expanse of African peoples. The sometimes bewildering confusion of many new terms and names may be avoided by limiting the material to a single group, yet the students still gain a sense of the major trends that would normally be treated in an overview. Because students are likely to be somewhat familiar with Manding culture through the impact of Alex Haley's Roots, a study of the Manding provides an excellent beginning for the consideration of Africa and its relationship to Afro-American society. A wealth of fine readings may be tapped by a teacher for use in a Manding unit--materials that range from dozens of descriptions of the ancient Manding empire of Mali to analyses of the modern problems of economic development and drought available in newspapers, current magazines, and government reports.

Because they often express the values of a people in a direct and personalized way, works of literature are especially effective vehicles for helping students get inside African cultures. We recommend three books that are particularly good sources for student use and teacher's background. Camara Laye's The Dark Child (Noonday paperback, $2.95) is an autobiographical account of growing up in colonial Guinea. It provides an excellent picture of Manding social structure and family relations, a sensitive retelling of ceremonial experiences associated with coming of age, and a glimpse of the pressures associated with French colonial rule and the resiliency of African culture. D. T.

Niané's Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali[4] (paperback from Humanities Press, $2.25) records the traditions sung by griots, or oral historians, that tell of the thirteenth-century founding of the empire of Mali by the Manding hero, Sundiata. Useful for comparisons with epic poems in other world areas, the narrative describes Sundiata's miraculous birth and youth, documents the multiple roles played in traditional Manding society by griots, blacksmiths, hunters, and diviners (soothsayers), evokes the spirit of court life in medieval African kingdoms, and justifies the legal and judicial structures of the Mali empire. The first thirty-two chapters of Alex Haley's Roots (Dell paperback $2.75) parallel Camara Laye's book in their wealth of cultural information but differ in that they date to an earlier historical period and stress the disruptions engendered by the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

The following themes or topics should be considered in the study of the Manding. Passages from the three books cited above elaborate and personalize each; in addition, sources for further information are listed where appropriate. An excellent source for general background information is Paul Bohannan and Philip Curtin's Africa and Africans (Natural History Press paperback $2.95).

1. Confronting the Myths. Students need to explore their own attitudes toward Africa and discuss how those impressions have been formed. Do they view Africans through the "savage native" stereotype so often fostered in the American media? Or do they see Africans as people with needs and desires similar to humankind everywhere, people who have responded, innovated and adjusted to their particular environment to create their own culture and civilization?

Sources: Evelyn Jones Rich's articles, "Mind your Language," Africa Report (Sept. 1974) and "Mark my Word," Africa Report (Nov.-Dec.1976).

[4]Brief excerpts of Sundiata are reprinted in Leon E. Clark's excellent anthology for students, Through African Eyes, Vol. III (Praeger, 1970).

Excellent exercises for opening discussion on stereotypes may be found in African Studies Handbook for Teachers, Part I (University of Massachusetts/Worcester Teacher Corps, 1971).

2. Climate and Ecology. Manding peoples live in all of the three dominant climate types of Africa--forest, savannah, and desert. The majority, however, live in the savannah grasslands of West Africa's sudanic belt; traditionally their main occupation has been agriculture, including the cultivation of the staples of millet, rice and sorghum.

3. Families and Social Structure. Typical characteristics of the Manding include patriliny, i.e. the tracing of descent through the males in a family, and polygyny, or the marriage by a man of more than one wife. Extended family members--family elders, unmarried sisters, brothers and their wives and children --live in a compound residential pattern, that is in a grouping of buildings surrounded by a wall. Certain large family groups or clans are associated with particular professions; among them, the blacksmiths, the praise-singers (griots), and the leatherworkers form separate castes. Young people are organized into age grades, separate groups of non-kin boys and girls organized for social and educational functions.

4. Trade and markets. Manding middlemen were involved in the trans-Saharan trade of gold, salt and other commodities as early as the period of the empire of Ghana (c.5th - 13th century). Often called "Dyula traders" because "dyula" (pronounced ju-la) is the Manding word for "trader", the Manding are still well known for their economic hegemony over trade routes from Senegal to Ghana.

Sources: E. W. Bovill, The Golden Trade of the Moors. Oxford, 1968.

Basil Davidson, A History of West Africa. Anchor, 1966.

5. Religion. Most Manding peoples are Muslim, although traditional African religious beliefs still persist, and in several areas people have converted to Christianity. The Manding were important in the spread of Islam socially and

geographically in West Africa. Originally the religion of the ruling families, Islam gradually moved down through the various classes of Manding society. Moreover, the religion was carried south from the area of the Niger River through the activities of Dyula traders.

Sources: I. G. Edmonds, Islam. Franklin Watts, 1977.

Caesar E. Farah, Islam. Barron's Educational Series, 1968.

6. Education. Children are trained in as many as three education systems, often simultaneously--indigenous, Islamic, and western. African education (sometimes called initiation or manhood training) traditionally includes training in Manding history and culture, circumcision of boys and excision of girls, and lessons in ethics and community values. Qur'anic (Koranic) schools train children to recite the holy book of Islam in Arabic and teach them the basic tenets of the faith. Western schools were first set up in the colonial period and continue to be closely linked in structure and curriculum to practices in the former colonial powers of Britain and France.

7. The Arts. Distinctive visual arts traditions include sculpture in wood, mosque architectural styles, and textile decoration. The literary arts include oral history and folktales. Music has numerous social and political functions; prominent among the most common instruments are those used by griots, the kora, which has twenty-one strings, and the balafon, an ancestor of the modern xylophone.

Sources: African Arts magazine, published quarterly at UCLA, frequently features Manding arts and has included the following useful articles:

"The Politics of Music in Mali," vol. 1, no. 3 (1968)
"Sudanese Architecture and the Manding," vol. III, no. 4 (1970)
"Bokolanfini: Mud Cloth of the Bamana of Mali," vol.III, no.4 (1970)
"Dance of the Tyi Wara", vol. IV, no. 1 (1970)
"Mandinka Drumming," vol. VII, no. 4 (1974)

8. West African History/Pre-colonial Political Systems. The empire of Mali, whose strength was based on trans-Saharan trade, developed from a federation.

of small Manding chiefdoms based on the clan or family. Mali reached its height in the early fourteenth century under Mansa Musa. Later it went into a long decline and by the 18th century had broken down into separate independent states.

Sources: Lester Brooks, Great Civilizations of Ancient Africa. Four Winds Press, 1971.

Daniel Chu and Elliott Skinner, A Glorious Age in Africa. Doubleday, 1965.

Nehemiah Levtzion, Ancient Ghana and Mali. Harper and Row, 1973.

9. Slavery and the Slave Trade. A type of servitude often called "domestic slavery" existed among the Manding. Fundamentally different from New World chattel slavery, domestic slaves usually were not sold, often held responsible positions, sometimes married into the owner's family, and after a generation or two normally were incorporated into the family to which they were attached. Some Manding groups were involved in the trans-Saharan or the overseas slave trade.

Sources: Philip D. Curtin, Africa Remembered. University of Wisconsin Press, 1968.

David Killingray, A Plague of Europeans. Penguin Education, 1973.

I. Kopytoff and S. Meiers, Slavery in Africa. University of Wisconsin Press, 1977.

Philip D. Curtin, "The Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600-1800," in J. Ajayi and M. Crowder, History of West Africa, vol. I, Longman,1971.

10. Africa and the European Conquest. Aside from trading links along the West African coast, Manding peoples as a whole generally had few contacts with Europeans prior to the colonial conquest at the end of the nineteenth century. Among the best known of resistance fighters against that conquest was the Mandingo Samori Toure, who built an empire and defended it against the French

until he was defeated in 1898.

Sources: Wilfred Cartey and Martin Kilson, The Africa Reader: Colonial Africa. Vintage, 1970.

David Killingray, Samori Toure: Warrior King. Hulton 'Round the World' series, 1973.

Y. Person, "Samori and Resistance to the French," in R. Rotberg and A. Mazrui, Protest and Power in Black Africa. Oxford, 1970.

11. Colonialism, the Rise of Nationalism and Independence. Manding peoples fell under both French and British rule. Important national leaders from among them have included Modibo Keita, former president of Mali, and Sekou Toure, president of Guinea since independence in 1958.

12. The Development Dilemma/the Problems of Drought and Desertification. Because many Manding peoples live in the Sahel, the border area between desert and savannah in West Africa, their efforts to work toward development have been compounded by the continuing effects of drought.

All of these themes are appropriate and important to the study of the Manding; most have parallels in the experience of other African peoples. A teacher might easily generalize from these specifics to broad continent-wide trends; in similar fashion, a teacher might invite his/her students to compare other groups' experience with that of the Manding. Parallel studies based on numerous literary and nonfiction sources could be developed for other selected African ethnic groups. A teacher who wises to enlarge a study of Africa with a comparative group might select in particular the Yoruba of Nigeria, the Igbo (Ibo) of Nigeria, the Kikuyu of Kenya, the Kpelle of Liberia, or the Zulu of South Africa.

The African Studies Program of the University of Illinois lends AV materials--films, slide sets, filmstrips, and cassette tapes--to teachers at no charge. Several items in our collection would be valuable supplements to a unit on the Manding. For more information, contact:

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